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Neoliberalism and the Antagonisms of Authoritarian Resilience in the Middle East

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FORTHCOMING IN « THE SOUTH ATLANTIC QUARTERLY »

— This paper examines the evolving symbiosis of authoritarian state power and neoliberal governance in the Middle East in the wake of the 2007–8 economic crisis and popular uprisings in 2011–13. I revisit the debates on "authoritarian resilience" in the region to highlight that the efforts to push through neoliberal reforms in the face of popular opposition have expanded the scope of authoritarian rule. However, the *strengthening* of the executive power further creates antagonisms which are bound to result in the *weakening* of the state's institutional capacity and legitimacy to enforce those reforms. These considerations highlight the fissures of "authoritarian resilience" in the region and signal that state centralization and the strengthening of executive power could produce avenues for contesting both neoliberalism and authoritarianism.

authoritarian resilience ▪ democratization ▪ Egypt ▪ neoliberalism ▪ Turkey

The election of Donald Trump in the US following a campaign built on racial(ized) and economic anxieties, the Brexit vote—which revolved around a deluge of imperial nostalgia and economic discontent—a right-wing populist surge in Europe (Mudde 2016), the revival of "illiberal democracies" (Rupnik 2016), and a wave of "populist authoritarian" regimes gaining increased visibility and power across the world (Chako and Jayasuriya 2017) are fuelling widespread concerns about a broader shift towards authoritarianism and the viability of (liberal) democracies. The proliferation of the terms of reference and concepts utilized in these discussions defies clear-cut categorization, but the extent of political and academic soul-searching propelled by these phenomena suggests that for many observers of democratic politics, democracy is under threat. This apprehension has resulted in renewed efforts to understand and explain the seeming appeal of right-wing populist, authoritarian and even fascist ideas and practices across the world. For those who are more concerned with the developments in the global North, Middle Eastern politics has been quickly positioned as the ideal source of comparison to unpack the Western democracies' illiberal/authoritarian drift, leading many observers to highlight the affinities between the emergent (or more accurately, now explicit) practices in the distressed Western democracies and authoritarian governments in the Middle East (Rachman 2017; Klaas 2018). Such affinities have been further bolstered by the renewed diplomatic support the Trump administration has extended to Presidents Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan—both of whom received a warm welcome in the White House.

While the expanding range of practices shared between these governments should be recognized and scrutinized, the positioning of Middle Eastern states in these conversations about the future of democracy raises further questions. For some, the engagement with Middle Eastern states seems to be designed to procure "lessons" for the West, an exercise that often results in exceptionalizing the state practices in the region and signals that these practices are being imported into the otherwise healthy and well-functioning institutions of Western democracies.[1] Furthermore, the suggested "lessons" are limited to the "political" components of authoritarianism(s), thus leaving out some key questions around, among others, class relations, social reproduction and the distribution and ownership of resources and wealth. In other words, there is a risk that such comparative efforts could interpret the illiberal/authoritarian shift in the West as a moment of exception and conversely associate authoritarianism as a set of policies and practices that are ordinarily found "out there", e.g. in the Middle East.

How can we make sense of this emergent web of practices that observers identify in both the illiberalizing Western democracies and minimal or non-democracies in the Middle East? What sort of concepts help us examine this "authoritarian turn" in global politics without associating authoritarian practices strictly with regional dynamics or rendering them as external anomalies to the "normal" operation of Western democracies? In this paper, I offer a tentative strategy with which to unpack these questions and contextualize the proliferation of authoritarian state practices in the global North and South as a partial product of neoliberalization. I revisit the authoritarian resilience and democratization discussions to suggest a number of ways with which we can chart out the relationship between neoliberalism and democratic debilitation, by which I refer not only to a degradation in the effectiveness and legitimacy of representative democratic institutions, but also to a shift from political deliberation and contestation towards executive control in shaping policy (White 2015; Clua-Losada and Ribera-Almandoz 2017).

Ongoing popular acts of resistance that take both quotidian and organized, collective forms in the Middle East continue to undermine the established notions of "resilient" authoritarian rule. It is, after all, only a few years ago that monumental waves of popular mobilizations swept the region, generating much discussion about the prospects of a region-wide "transition" to democracy. The uprisings complicated the dominant narratives of democratization and authoritarianism by drawing attention to the questions of political economy and articulating a common language that unequivocally centered on material struggles. Mobilizations were not only propelled against authoritarian rule, but also against the wide-ranging consequences of neoliberalization (Bogaert 2013; Hanieh 2013). While it would be reductive to portray the diverse motivations of the mobilized masses as a unified response to a monolithic "neoliberalism", it is undeniable that many of the material predicaments targeted by the masses had been triggered by waves of neoliberal reform which reconfigured the states' (re)distributive mechanisms and rapidly deteriorated material conditions for different social forces. Despite the inability of the revolts to drastically change the trajectory of neoliberalization, it is important to recognize them as a key moment that conjoined the calls for democratization with demands for alternative socio-economic arrangements.

Against the background of ostensible authoritarian "resilience" in the Middle East and in dialogue with the recent contributions in critical political economy that emphasize the importance of moving away from domination-oriented accounts of neoliberalism (Bailey et al. 2017), I will offer snapshots to highlight the extant and emerging fissures in the armor of authoritarian states. The bulk of my discussion is organized around material drawn from the cases of Egypt and Turkey—two countries that witnessed both the largest and most sustained mobilizations in the 2011–2013 period and a rapid (re)constitution of authoritarian state practices in the aftermath of the uprisings. The paper, accordingly, advances two interlinked arguments: (1) Focus on the persistence of authoritarianism in the Middle East needs to be complemented with an appreciation of how neoliberalism has provided an alternative development and legitimization strategy for authoritarian governments, thus bolstering and actively reproducing the practices of authoritarian statecraft; (2) analyses of the "resilience" of authoritarianism should be complemented with a deeper attention paid to how the mechanisms of authoritarian rule erode structures of legitimacy and political action, which ultimately destabilize even the most ostensibly "resilient" regimes.

Authoritarian resilience and neoliberalism in the Middle East

Just as the recent political developments in the global North and South are compelling scholars to rethink the way democracy and authoritarianism are conceptualized,[2] the uprisings of 2011–13 in the Middle East have left their imprint on a range of debates and approaches. Since 2011, the established categories that have long shaped the study of the region have been thrown into disarray or given a new lease of life (Pace and Cavatorta 2012; Bellin 2012; Hale 2014; Tansel 2018a). A major area of contestation emerged around the debates on authoritarian resilience/persistence and democratization, two cognate literatures that have been deployed extensively to explain a key research puzzle, namely the apparent non-existence or weakness of democracy in the Middle East (particularly in Arab states), and the continuing ability of the region's authoritarian regimes to reproduce

themselves despite a global trajectory marked by the "third wave of democratization" from 1970s onwards (Albrecht and Schlumberger 2004).

Repeated efforts to piece this puzzle together have often remained within the confines of a deeply Eurocentric perspective on the region, one which exacerbates a dichotomous understanding of political and socio-economic change in the global North versus South, and insufficiently situates the practices of authoritarian statecraft in the Middle East within a global context shaped by imperialist geopolitics. The constitutive contributions to both the democratization and authoritarian resilience literatures prioritized domestic variables, and despite some noteworthy efforts to bring "the international" back in to the analysis, a stable mix of assumptions revolving around the themes of domestic elite alliances/contestations, cultural attitudes and institutional weaknesses have dominated the way most scholars examined the question of democracy in the region. Normatively and methodologically, the democratization scholarship has remained wedded to "a particular interpretation of Western democracies' historical development", which has resulted in the privileging of liberal democracy as the ultimate end point of political development (Teti 2012: 13).

Notwithstanding the important insights offered by both the pre- and post-uprisings literature on democratization and authoritarian resilience,[3] there are two issues that compel us to engage more critically with the way authoritarian state practices are conceptualized and should be linked to the processes of neoliberalization. First, the internalist focus of the dominant approaches to democratization has carried significant ramifications for how the region's economic trajectory is examined and represented. One key side effect has been the decoupling of "economic" and "political" questions and their treatment as separate variables, with the "political" components often receiving priority in analyzing the barriers to and prospects of democracy (cf. Abdelrahman 2012; Teti 2012). This tendency to bifurcate the questions of political economy from a wider analysis of democracy and authoritarianism has either produced a problematic focus on concepts such as the "rentier state" (cf. Allinson 2015), or, more recently, distorted the way many observers interpreted the impact of neoliberalization, particularly in periods where the governments succeeded in meeting certain macroeconomic targets such as improvements in GDP growth rates (Tansel 2018a). In the cases of Egypt and Turkey, short-term macroeconomic achievements gave rise to a popular narrative of success stories,[4] which served to underplay the socio-economic, political and environmental costs of growth and to legitimize neoliberal reform.

Second, even in the carefully constructed accounts of post-uprisings resilience, there is a danger of assigning too much stability and coherence to the reconstituted authoritarianisms. Authoritarian states in the region continue to breed instability and insecurity in no small part due to the employed neoliberal reforms' increasing inability to offer economic justice. As the 2014 Arab Transformations survey reveals, citizens' distrust in the states' ability to improve economic conditions remains high in Arab states. For example, 69.2 percent of the respondents in Egypt highlighted economic grievances as the main trigger of the uprisings, yet economic concerns continued to dominate the public mood with 90.3 percent of the respondents flagging up the economic situation as the biggest challenge facing the country (Abbott and Teti 2017: 2). A similar trend is visible in Turkey, where the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) celebrated "growth" years failed to produce sustainable job creation and recent surveys signal that the state of the economy is increasingly becoming a major concern for the population (Sönmez 2018; Ipsos 2018).

I will dedicate the remaining pages to highlight how the extreme concentration of power and decision-making in the executive and the incumbents' continuing commitment to neoliberalization are prone to weakening authoritarian states. I will bookend this analysis with a brief discussion of the external barriers imposed upon the social forces in the region and why the efforts to contest neoliberalism and authoritarianism in the Middle East have to be complemented with struggles to produce a broader political movement to prevent international donors from actively buttressing authoritarian regimes.

The (authoritarian) neoliberal bargain: Sustaining growth or legitimacy?

In what ways has neoliberalization complemented and reproduced authoritarian rule in the Middle East? While the international pressure to enforce macroeconomic reforms was central to neoliberal restructuring, it is vital to remember that state managers and incumbent rulers saw in prescribed policies a "development strategy" to forestall economic crises and re-activate their bases of social support (Connell and Dados 2014: 122–124). In many instances, policymakers and advisers who can be classified as ideologically committed neoliberals, such as those who populated Ahmed Nazif's government (2004–2011) in Egypt or the technocrats that comprised Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri's inner circle in Lebanon, entered the picture much later on (Beinin 2009: 450; Joya 2011: 370–371; Baumann 2016: 88–89). What pushed many countries in the region from the early 1980s onwards to abandon or vitiate the pre-existing models of state-led development in favor of neoliberalization was their inability to mitigate the structural limits imposed on them by their particular mode of integration into the global economy.[5] The slowly appearing cracks in the developmentalist compact "posed a crisis of social control that by its nature could not easily be compensated for by intensified repression" (Tripp 2013: 148), thus compelling policymakers and autocratic rulers to seek out new sources of economic stability and to establish international alliances.

From the end of the 1970s and throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, state-led development strategies built around import-substitution industrialization (ISI), resource exports and corporatist alliances faced multiple challenges, which forced many states to seek assistance from international financial institutions (IFIs) and to consider a radical realignment in their extant development models. The resultant recipes implemented throughout the 1980s and 1990s coalesced around analogous efforts of

> privatising 'inefficient' state-owned enterprises, and adopting 'fiscal responsibility', de-emphasising public investment and social expenditures. Macroeconomic policies were reoriented, with the priority of combating inflation, attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), and increasing openness to trade and capital flows (Naqib 2016: 42).

Neoliberalism thus emerged as an alternative accumulation strategy that prioritized the commodification of public resources, regressive redistribution policies and a wider adoption of "market-like" organization in social life that reconfigured the relationship between the state and households (Mudge 2008: 718–719). The "economic" components of this restructuring which aimed at offsetting the fiscal crisis took on similar forms in different countries, but just as with other instances of neoliberalization around the world, the projects of state restructuring and economic reform that we

now commonly label as "neoliberal" in the region were designed and implemented by political forces of differing shades of legitimacy, and materialized in a range of institutional settings.

In Turkey, this effort was led by the junta government of 1980, which rapidly took on the responsibility to enforce economic reforms that the civilian governments could not have done so within the constraints of a minimal, but functioning parliamentary democracy. The military-led incubation period effectively shielded neoliberal reform from public contestation and paved the way for the delegation of policymaking to technocratic preferences after the transition to civilian rule. In Egypt, reforms were brought about within a context of "*de facto* one-party domination in a formally permitted multi-party system" (Ayubi 1995: 351). The liberalization efforts materialized as early as 1974 with the *infitah*. However, the dismantling of the Nasserite *étatism* required a careful balancing act between various corporatist forces, as radical steps provoked resistance such as the bread riots of January 1977—unleashed by the announcement of an IMF-induced cut in subsidies (Chalcraft 2016: 415). As a result, neoliberalization in Egypt manifested at a slower pace compared to the Turkish case and the scope of reforms expanded most significantly from the early 1990s onwards.

Despite institutional varieties, the reforms in Turkey and Egypt served a common purpose by reconfiguring the states' relationship with their citizens and their welfare provision responsibilities which created severe implications for employment patterns, household incomes and access to services. Both societies witnessed an erosion of social and political gains that they had accumulated in the aftermath of their national liberation through state-led development policies. This was a trend reflected in other cases of neoliberalization in the region: state expenditures in most Arab states decreased drastically throughout the 1990s after reaching their peak levels in the early 1980s, a process which was accompanied by the collapse of public investment in the same period with drastic implications for housing, education and healthcare (Cammett and Diwan 2016: 67–71). Even in the periods of relative stability and growth, macroeconomic "success" did not necessarily translate into material improvements and the "rise in the degree of income maldistribution voided the broader welfare benefits of growth" (Kadri 2016: 4). As Angela Joya observes with respect to the Egyptian case, "[e]ven during the years of 7 per cent growth rates (2006–08) poor quality jobs without written contracts or social security were increasing, putting in doubt the neoliberal rationale that high growth levels would translate into higher living standards and decent job creation" (Joya 2017: 346).

The shift from state-led developmental models to neoliberalism did not only restructure economic policymaking, but it also paved the way for a radical overhaul of the social and political alliances that sustained both the (minimally) democratic and authoritarian state forms in the region. Neoliberalization has eroded the material infrastructure of the developmentalist compact, which was built around the state's pledge to "ensure social justice, foster economic development, and guarantee national interests in return for the political acquiescence of the citizenry" (Kamrava 2014: 20; Salem 2018: 130–132). As Mehran Kamrava highlights, from the 1980s onwards, "[t]o compensate for their diminishing or non-existent legitimacy they [regimes] often alternated between repressing and co-opting the opposition, and relied increasingly on elements of repression and fear to stay in power" (Kamrava 2014: 27). This should not be read to the effect that pre-neoliberal regimes in Turkey and Egypt were necessarily more democratic than their current incarnations. But the developmentalist compact—regardless of its democratic shortcomings—did succeed in "grounding" it-

self in "popular consent" to a significant extent until the 1970s and 1980s, and thereby was effective in assisting the regimes in avoiding major legimation crises (De Smet and Bogaert 2017: 212).

Accordingly, neoliberalization has been intimately linked to the survival and maintenance of authoritarianism in the region. When the reforms succeeded in providing a short-term fix to the macroeconomic predicaments, they offered a degree of stability and enhanced legitimacy to crisis-stricken governments and rulers. However, the negative socio-economic impact of the reforms meant that the veneer of economic stability has been difficult to sustain and the implementation of neoliberal restructuring has continued to trigger political opposition and social mobilization against these policies as well as the rulers and governments behind them.

Legitimacy, centralization, repression

A focus on how the transition to neoliberalism has generated legitimacy issues for the rulers and governments in the region allows us to trace both the new repertoires of authoritarian rule and the acts of resistance and counter-mobilization that neoliberalization continues to provoke. This argument, in and of itself, is not new: Nazih Ayubi (1995), for example, documented how liberalization and privatization undermined the developmentalist compact in Arab states and helped unleash further authoritarian practices to solidify the regimes. More recently, Ian Bruff (2014: 124) pointed out the amplification of authoritarian practices produced by neoliberalism's legitimation crises and suggested that the present configuration of authoritarian neoliberalism in the global North produces a simultaneous strengthening and weakening of the state—a dialectic marked by the state's increased deployment of coercive, non-democratic measures and the parallel erosion of its legitimacy.

Given the reconstitution of authoritarian state power in the region in the aftermath of the uprisings, it is easy to prioritize authoritarian "resilience" and lose sight of the ever-present tensions between the expanded scope of repression and maintaining legitimacy. Equally important is the continuing role neoliberalization plays in heightening this contradiction as the process of unleashing extensive redistributive reforms also involves "the open-ended challenges of *managing* the attendant economic consequences, social fallout, and political counteractions" (Peck, Theodore and Brenner 2010: 106, emphasis added). To unpack this contradiction further, below I will discuss the episodes of labor mobilization and urban governance reform where we can identify the state strengthening/weakening dialectic at work in Egypt and Turkey.

Despite their relative absence as an important actor in the democratization literature—especially in comparison to the military, "middle classes" and Islamists (cf. Allinson 2015)—organized labor continues to be a key agent in challenging the authoritarian rule in both Egypt and Turkey. While the trade unions did not represent the dominant force in the uprisings, the organized labor struggles had a key role in mobilizing the masses both before and during the events. Prior to the uprisings, both countries witnessed major workers' actions which were sustained and received popular support from wider segments of society. In Egypt, the period of 1998–2008 witnessed the mobilization of 2 million workers, which represented "the largest and most sustained social movement in Egypt since the campaign to oust the British occupiers following the end of World War II" (Beinin 2009: 449). This mobilization intensified with the opposition to the Labour Law of 2003, which, while legalizing strike action under strict terms, formalized short-term contracts and

curbed employment rights (Duboc 2014: 234–235). "The landmark strike of 24,000 workers of El-Mahalla al-Kubra Spinning and Weaving Company in 2006 opened the door for an avalanche of labour mobilisation", followed by further factory occupations and hunger strikes (Abdelrahman 2012: 617). In Turkey, rapidly decreasing union density circumscribed the scope of workers' action, yet the pre-Gezi public sphere was still marked by significant mobilizations, including a 78-day long occupation organized by the workers of the privatized tobacco monopoly TEKEL in Ankara.

The crucial point here is that these mobilizations emerged *despite* a radical expansion of anti-union measures and the governments' attempts to control the labor movement. The AKP government's industrial relations and labor markets reforms have been a key aspect of a broader trajectory of neoliberalization. Labor legislation has promoted flexibilization and undermined contractual rights, while simultaneously tightening the restrictions on collective bargaining and trade union mobilization which has effectively resulted in a process of government-supported deunionization (Bozkurt-Güngen 2018). Workers' mobilizations in the AKP era have had to contest both the legislative attacks on trade unionism and the government's decision to "postpone" key strike actions on dubious "national security" grounds (Çelik 2015: 630). In Egypt, the labor mobilization could be contained neither by the state's supervision attempts through the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF)—which "served as a state instrument to curb labor militancy rather than an organization representing labor interests" (Duboc 2014: 247)—nor by the post-uprising attacks on independent collective action led by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces.

It is important to highlight that the governments' attempts to limit organized dissent and protect important pieces of legislation from public contestation do not exclusively rely on "extra-legal" means, but are constituted by a mixture of overt coercive action and legislative reform. Anti-democratic practices and contentious pieces of policymaking are increasingly legislated and constitutionalized. The legal codification of these practices does contribute to the strengthening of the regimes in the sense that the political spaces in which dissident social forces could formulate oppositional demands are curtailed. Yet, at the same time, these exclusions can create further fissures, leading social and political antagonisms to appear in other arenas.

In Egypt, the state's attempt to control the labor movement through the ETUF increased the rift between the union hierarchy and rank-and-file members, and triggered the development of independent trade unions—including the formal recognition of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU). While the EFITU itself has taken a conservative line after 2013, workers' mobilization in Egypt has continued to develop at a steady pace (Charbel 2016). In Turkey, trade union organization has witnessed radical attacks following the declaration of emergency rule, including an expansion of the existing legislation on strike bans which has resulted in bans for seven strike actions since July 2016. The "legal" barriers erected against formal labor mobilization have curtailed the number of actions—involving both workplace-based actions and general workers' protests—from just over a thousand in 2014 to 607 in 2017. Yet the individual actions, which also encompass ad hoc and diffuse forms of protest embraced by public and private workers, increased from 729 in 2016 to 1,313 in 2017 (see Figure 1).[6]

Another important site where we can trace the unintended mobilizational effect of expanding authoritarian rule, and in particular, executive centralization, is the neoliberalization of urban governance in Turkey. As with other key policy areas, the AKP government has pursued centralization in urban governance, by blurring the separation of powers, cutting out independent auditing mech-

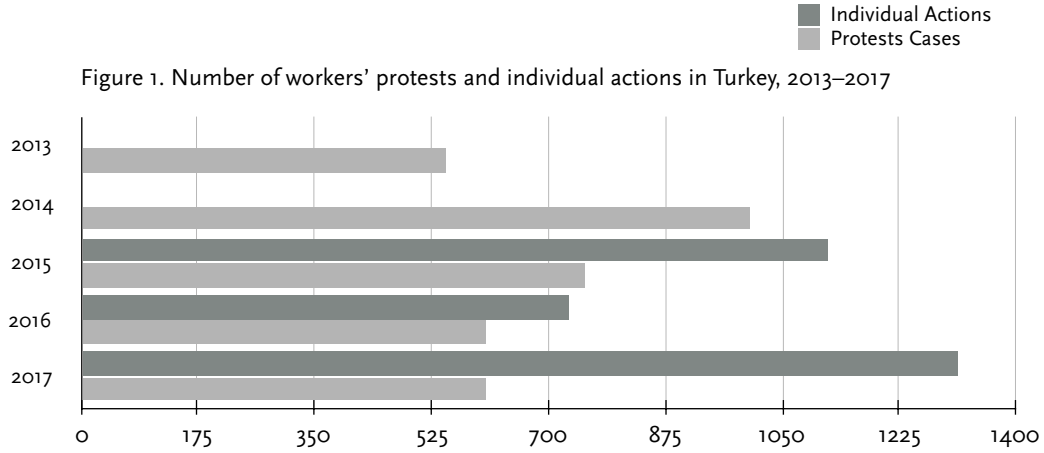

Figure 1. Number of workers' protests and individual actions in Turkey, 2013–2017

Source: Emek Çalışmaları Topluluğu (2018: 12). No data provided in the source for individual actions in 2013 and 2014.

anisms, limiting public participation in policy discussions and selectively empowering/disempowering local authorities. Since 2003, the government has continually enhanced the powers of the Housing Development Administration (TOKİ) and deployed it as a vehicle to expand the housing stock. Operating directly under the Prime Minister's office, TOKİ has been authorized to expropriate land and property, claim ownership of the existing treasury lands and facilitate public-private partnerships to implement urban transformation projects (Tansel 2018b). Despite its "social" objectives, the Administration has become a *de facto* private competitor *and* regulator in Turkey's lucrative housing market, and utilized its broad competencies to commodify land and property, as well as "acting as a catalyst for the private sector" through its revenue-sharing partnerships (Atasoy 2016: 671).

The Administration's legally sanctioned ability to unilaterally launch urban transformation projects has sparked resistance from residents and civil society groups, and in several cases, the courts ordered the Administration to halt or revise the projects. Yet TOKİ projects have remained immune to these challenges, as the very grounds on which the Administration can claim ownership of land and properties have been carefully codified and legalized by legislative and administrative reform. On the surface, this suggests another signature case of state strengthening. Yet these nodes of executive centralization further trigger mobilizations beyond the established avenues of policy contestation. As Sultan Tepe notes with regards to two contested urban transformation projects in Istanbul, the ease with which legal challenges are dismissed by the project implementers "encouraged citizens to focus their efforts on forming collective action and putting pressure on elected officials" (Tepe 2016: 82)—a trend widely observable in both urban and rural struggles against privatization and commodification of land during the AKP era (Eraydın and Taşan-Kok 2014; Arsel, Akbulut and Adaman 2015). The barriers placed in front of public participation and contestation by state strengthening divert rather than completely thwart resistance, and could further function as triggers for further mobilization.

External anchors of authoritarian resilience

Beyond the often emphasized internal challenges to democratization, the prospect of radical democratic transformation in the region also faces significant external restraints. These restraints are exacerbated by the Western governments' increasingly conservative and technocratic "democracy promotion" programs and the global donors' (including the BRICS') documented tendency to favor authoritarian stability over social and political change in the region. Externally induced democratization measures are not only influenced by the donors' interests and their relations with the recipient governments, but also constrained and "tamed" by competition for funding and by technocratic tendencies among "democracy assistance" organizations which compel them to focus on "measurable and regime-compatible programs" (Bush 2015: 186).

The restraints present in the "democracy promotion" programs have been mirrored in economic aid and development assistance initiatives. As Raymond Hinnebusch (2015: 28) has argued, "irreversible dependence on the West will continue to be a legitimacy liability in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) as many of the grievances that motivated the uprising can be traced back to Western pressures for neoliberalism and policies towards the region". Governmental assistance extended by Western powers have not only promoted neoliberalization, but have done so in excessively unequal terms that served to privilege their interest at the expense of the recipient countries. For example, the economic reforms promoted by the European Union as part of initiatives such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) came with strict conditionalities around trade liberalization in manufactured goods while simultaneously shielding the European markets from Middle Eastern and North African agricultural exports (Hollis 2012: 83). Revised objectives of the economic reform promoted by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) have further "moved towards deepening and broadening the scope of application of the same economic template" (Roccu 2017: 44). No less committed to neoliberalization than their Western counterparts, the Gulf states are also playing a crucial role in bolstering authoritarian regimes by providing them with economic and political assistance. As Adam Hanieh notes, "Unprecedented levels of financial support from the Gulf states have been central to the survival of the Sisi regime following the July 2013 coup" (2016: 1177).

Thus, even though the domestic antagonisms that are reproduced at the local level should not be disregarded in any analysis of authoritarian rule, the trajectories of democratization and neoliberalization in the region are ultimately tied to the broader regional and global dynamics that shape the states' and social forces' spaces of maneuver.

Conclusion

In his 1999 exploration of Egypt's neoliberalism, Timothy Mitchell highlighted that "[i]t is not uncommon now (…) to admit that so-called free-market reforms and globalisation may be accompanied by political repression". This statement was followed by a double warning Mitchell issued against both (neo)liberal observers who regarded such repression as "an unforeseen, unfortunate, and probably temporary side effect of the expansion of the global market", as well as those on the other side of the political fence who claimed that it was "the predictable, necessary, and probably long-term consequence of the logic of capitalist development" (1999: 465). For Mitchell, neoliberal-

ization in Egypt offered no clear-cut answers to the key question on the relationship between democracy and capitalism.

Mitchell was certainly correct to recognize that coercion, and authoritarian statecraft in general, was not merely an undesirable offshoot of neoliberal globalization. Contrary to Mitchell's skepticism of an inherent relationship between capitalism and democracy, the contemporary wave of global democratic debilitation forces us to acknowledge the necessity of uncovering a structural coherence or capitalist "logic" behind the survival and expansion of authoritarian practices. Whether one identifies the capitalism–authoritarianism link in Europe by tracing the socio-economic and political impact of the shift from *Staatsvolk* to *Marktvolk* à la Wolfgang Streeck (2014), or in the ability of China and Russia to absorb market rule within a pre-established authoritarian framework, it is imperative to restate Nancy Fraser's observation that "present processes of de-democratization indicate something rotten not only in capitalism's current, financialized form but in capitalist society per se" (Fraser 2015: 159).

This recognition does not have to be bracketed with an additional provision to pursue and apply an already-formed and defined "post-neoliberal" program, nor should it lead to a "homogenization" of politics by hastily invoking problematic universalisms that underpinned Mitchell's original apprehension (1999: 465–466). Even if we resist theorizing a structural relationship between capitalism and democracy (and its debilitation), the messy aftermath of the uprisings clearly documents that certain tensions inherent to "the social and political organization of capitalism" (Harvey 1990: 109) very much shaped the degree to which competing social forces produced their political agendas. These contradictions were manifest in the post-uprising debates in Egypt and Turkey—for example, in Egypt, they revolved around the urgency of generating employment and keeping inflation in check while also provoking fears that the policies geared towards those objectives could be designed within the same framework of liberalization that marked the "crony capitalism" of the Mubarak era.

Thus, instead of interpreting the upheavals of 2011–13 as a failure to democratize the region, it is more accurate to read them as an "unresolved rupture" in the epoch of neoliberalism (Hall 2011: 705), which has created and continues to produce anti-democratic tendencies in both the global North and South. This emphasis on the anti-democratic pressures generated by neoliberalization allows us to avoid pathologizing authoritarian practices as characteristics of "political" systems outside the West, and to recognize them as modalities of rule that can emerge *anywhere* to alleviate or negate legitimacy crises. Liberal democracies themselves are not immune to incubating such practices: they are not only susceptible to producing their own authoritarian practices that are shaped by the lines of gender, class, race, ethnicity and (dis)ability; but are actively involved in propping up authoritarian regimes elsewhere. Just as authoritarian regimes are plagued with legitimacy crises, it is becoming increasingly visible that the institutions and practices of well-established Western democracies are too struggling to navigate the demands of competing social forces. The challenge for those concerned with the health of democracies is not exclusively extrapolating lessons from authoritarian regimes, but identifying and proposing alternatives for the structures that produce authoritarian state practices in the first place.

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Notes

1 See, for example, the repeatedly used medical analogies to portray authoritarianism as a foreign virus that threatens Western democracies: "While American democracy suffers from many ills, its immune system is strong enough to repel the virus and heal the body politic. Other countries may not be as fortunate" (Galston 2018).

2 See, *inter alia*, Diamond (2015); Bermeo (2016) and Kreuder-Sonnen (2018).

3 See, in particular, King (2009); Heydemann and Leenders (2011); Yom (2016).

4 See IMF (2007: 32) on Egypt; The Economist (2010) on Turkey and Tansel (2018a) for an overview.

5 By "abandoning" state-led development, I do not refer to some sort of "retreat of the state" that many observers had once associated with the expansion of neoliberalism and globalization. The state's key role in supervising and actively constituting "the market" has been transformed, rather than dissolved, throughout neoliberal restructuring (Tansel 2017; Peck, Theodore and Brenner 2012: 277).

6 This trend can be attributed to a 130,000-strong strike by the metal workers' unions (the strike was eventually banned by the government) and protests by workers laid off from their jobs by decree laws (Emek Çalışmaları Topluluğu 2018: 6).

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